

Date: February 19, 2013

From: Susan Papa, New Haven, CT

To: Conn. Representative Andrew Fleischmann, Co-chair, Education Committee
Conn. Senator Andrea Stillman, Co-chair, Education Committee
Conn. Representative Toni Walker, Co-chair, Appropriations Committee
Conn. Senator Toni Harp, Co-chair, Appropriations Committee

I ask your help in reversing Governor Malloy's cut to the After-School Grant Program. I am a longtime New Haven Public Schools parent and volunteer; currently, my child is at Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School (Co-op). I have taught in public high and middle schools. And once upon a time, I attended elementary and secondary public schools.

I explain my background so you will know that I have seen much in public education, but I have never seen an after-school program as vibrant, engaging, and exciting as Co-op After School (CAS). Students eagerly sign up by the hundreds, squeezing in as many courses as they can. Staff and faculty support and operate CAS wholeheartedly, with love, energy, and creativity. Community partners, including Yale students, are regular, enthusiastic fixtures. And the best part? The kids just can't get enough of it.

How often do you hear of a school offering something that its students can't get enough of?

The courses are jaw-droppingly wide-ranging: steel drum band; improvisation; debate; bioethics; basketball; a cappella singing; nature sketching; graphic design; sisterhood support; jazz dance; performance makeup; knitting; book group; gay-straight alliance; chess; handmade books; stop animation; philosophy; physical acting; online magazine—and quite a bit more! When my daughter read this term's offerings, she sat quietly for a moment and then said, "I am so incredibly lucky to go to my school."

How often do you hear a high school student say such words?

Co-op is a popular choice for urban and suburban families seeking good public education, and a major reason for that is CAS. It's true that New Haven schools and students have their struggles. But CAS is the kind of program that lifts a student, letting her surmount and leave such struggles behind. It breathes life and community, promise and learning, joy and spirit, into our school and nearly everyone in it.

How often do we hear, "What can be done to keep kids productively occupied outside school hours"?

Co-op After School is one excellent answer to that question. CAS works a lot of magic for a lot of students with relatively little funding. Please help us keep the Co-op After School program, and others like it, alive for Connecticut youth!